

DULUTH ROOM

Medium: Decorative Arts and Utilitarian Objects, Furniture /Cypress, walnut, leather, wool, cotton, velvet, bronze, glass, leaded glass, painted canvas, photographs, paper

Size: 37 x 34 3/4 x 33 1/2in

Creation Place: North America, United States, Minnesota, Minneapolis

Culture: North America, United States, Minnesota

Style: 20th century

Accession Number: 82.43.1

BACKGROUND

Interior designer John Scott Bradstreet (1845-1914) arrived in Minnesota in 1874, by way of Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island, where he had worked at the Gorham Silver Company. From his earliest years here he was committed to providing imaginative interpretations of the latest interior decorating styles from Europe and Asia for both private and commercial clients, and by the 1890s he had developed a national reputation. With frequent trips overseas, he regularly updated his design vocabulary, while enhancing each room with European and Asian antiques and curios bought on his travels.



In 1904 Bradstreet opened his Craftshouse, loosely based on the English arts and crafts philosophy of William Morris, at 328 S. 7th Street in Minneapolis. There he marketed not only antiques and reproductions of historical styles, but also his *jindi-sugi* furniture and woodwork, adapted from the Japanese technique of artificially aging and carving cypress wood. This *jindi-sugi* finish became the trademark of John S. Bradstreet and Company and it is now recognized as his personal contribution to the American Arts and Crafts style.

Prindle House

One of Bradstreet's most important commissions was the Duluth home of William and Mina Merrill Prindle. William M. Prindle was an early developer of Duluth, heading his own real

estate company and encouraging Easterners to invest in the area. Mina Prindle developed interests of her own during her husband's travels, donating land for Duluth's parks and serving as a member of the city's park board. In 1904 the couple chose William Hunt of the firm Palmer, Hall, and Hunt, as the architect of their new home. From the Twin Cities, Mina Prindle chose William A. French and John Bradstreet to decorate the interiors.

Bradstreet used glass light fixtures and fireplace tiles manufactured by Tiffany Studios, and Mrs. Prindle incorporated Japanese-style decorative accessories that she purchased from the Craftshouse. She was so respectful of Bradstreet's accomplishment that the interior, finished in 1906, was virtually intact when the Institute acquired it 75 years later. Labels written in Mrs. Prindle's hand and attached to each piece, described their Bradstreet and Co. origin and documented the *jin-di-sugi* technique he had used. The Prindle house was given to the Institute two days before a house sale in June 1981 dispersed its contents. The furniture and many of the objects from the living room were acquired at the sale by the Institute, and the paneling and contents were removed and a complementary interior was installed. The house was sold in 1982 to the Religious Sisters of Mercy, who have made it the home of the John Duss Music Conservatory. Bradstreet worked for many of St. Paul's and Minneapolis' business elite, including the Pillsburys, Morrisons, William Dunwoody, and L.S. Donaldson, among others. His most complete interiors still in place are the five rooms executed at "Glensheen," the Chester Congdon residence in Duluth.

LIVING ROOM

For the living room of the house, which is displayed at the MIA, Bradstreet used carved *sugi*-finished wood in furniture that combined contemporary Art Nouveau ornamentation, including lotus leaves and flowers, with Queen Anne-style furniture forms.

Of the rooms in the house, the living room received the greatest attention, both financially and through Bradstreet's innovative and beautiful decoration. The shape of the room is slightly irregular. Bradstreet installed brown-toned *jin-di-sugi* paneling on the walls. Around the perimeter and above the fireplace are beautifully carved *sugi* floral panels.

FURNISHINGS

Many of the forms of furniture which Bradstreet designed were based on 18th-century English or American models. However, when it came to the surface decoration, Bradstreet's interest in rich visual texture and intricate patterning emerged as stylized transformations of nature. He occasionally rendered chair legs as growing branches with jagged leaf patterns carved at the knees. Many of the flat surfaces of his pieces were elaborately carved with oversized leaves and flowers, emphasizing a love of botanical motifs.

Japanese Influence

By 1900 Bradstreet had made at least six visits to Japan and had become very familiar with Japanese woodworking techniques. Bradstreet's Japanese influence is highly visible in this room, as is evident by the Japanese floral and bird carvings on the bay



opposite the fireplace, and the Japanese bird cage which was used as a decorative element. Pictures depicting Japanese subjects were also used as decoration.

Lotus Table

One of Bradstreet's most original and successful designs was the Lotus table. This table was conceived as an aquatic plant. The roots are hidden by an array of leaves which spread out artfully, while the top of the table simulates the surface of a pond covered with leaves and lotus flowers.

Tiffany

While Bradstreet's interest in botanical themes and his transformation of structural elements into natural motifs does not adhere very closely to English precedents, he was strongly influenced by the American interpretation of Art Nouveau, as exemplified by the work of Louis Tiffany. Bradstreet was impressed by Tiffany's use of organic forms, and used some of Tiffany's designs in the Prindle House living room

Tiffany favrile glass is used to outline the fireplace, as well as in the elaborate shades attached to the carved wall sconces. The carved cypress chandelier is also adorned with Tiffany favrile shades.

SUMMARY

The Prindle House living room was one of Bradstreet's most complete uses of the *jin-di-sugi* style which characterized so much of his work. He believed the theory of interior decorating was fellowship of good things. He thought period furniture was too restrictive and that one should select what seems best for him. He would visit the people at their homes before starting to work to find the people's personality and get an idea of the atmosphere. He never wanted too much of one style and always stressed first class workmanship. He was Minneapolis' foremost arbiter of taste and art critic. He had red hair and a goatee. He preferred to wear reddish tan clothes, all in perfect accord. He was very polished and always a gentleman.

REFERENCES

files from the Department of Decorative Arts, Sculpture and Architecture
MIA Bulletin, Volume LXV, 1981-1982

TOUR IDEAS

Decorative Arts

Minnesota

How people live

